

# **Growth, Gender and Equity NEPAD and the Renaissance: Myth or Reality?**

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## **Introduction**

An analysis of countries across the globe shows that the vast majority of the poorest are located in the Southern hemisphere, and are disproportionately present in the Africa. Despite years of struggle to get out of the malaise of underdevelopment, the continent is still trapped in poverty. The conditions that prevail continue to dehumanise and oppress large segments of populations on the continent, particularly women. Decolonisation in the narrow political sense may have taken place, but economic and cultural colonisation, very often disguised in subtle forms, still persist. The new face of globalisation, with India and China standing out as the emerging giants, should not be seen merely as a South-South co-operation. It is frequently also about the search for new and cheap sites of production, as well as a source of raw materials. This can also lead to multiple forms of oppression and exploitation, threatening livelihoods. This paper argues that development cannot and should not be seen within the narrow confines of growth. The current obsession with growth and wealth creation can impact negatively on issues of equity and livelihoods, leading to an exacerbation of the feminisation of poverty and to new challenges for governance.

It is an established fact that women are the poorest of the poor on the continent, and that any neoliberal project will marginalise women further. NEPAD, which is often seen as 'new wines in old bottles' will have the same deleterious impact on women as the structural adjustment programmes did. This paper goes beyond a feminist critique of NEPAD and extends the thinking of scholars such as Randriamaro and Longwe to argue that if there is to be gender justice and a more equitable world, there is an urgent need to develop and consolidate gender inclusive democratic developmental states. Only such states can contribute to make of NEPAD a more "capabilities enhancing" NEPAD and allow for a true renaissance.

In interrogating NEPAD and the growth obsession, the paper also articulates Diane Elson's theory of "Male Bias" and shows why it is important for Africa to break the gender silences that prevail in the theory and practice of development. The failure to do so will mean that attempts to "make poverty history" would be tantamount to mere rhetoric with the risk that the continent gets further marginalised and its people more impoverished. The paper ends by making some recommendations for an African feminist agenda, and pleads for gender inclusive democratic developmental states. Without the latter, the paper concludes, there will be no true renaissance.

### **1. Gender Prism of NEPAD: The Need to Move Towards a More Human/Gender-Faced NEPAD**

In the 50 years since Africa began its liberation from the yoke of colonialism, many attempts have been made to articulate a purposeful development paradigm for the continent. In October 2001, a new initiative called the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) was launched. NEPAD, an economic programme of the African Union, was designed to meet development objectives for Africa. It was a product of the merger between the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Program (MAP), proposed by presidents Thabo Mbeki (South Africa), Adelaziz Bouteflika (Algeria), and Olusegun Obasanjo (Nigeria), and the OMEGA Plan of President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal. Since then, NEPAD has been the subject of numerous conferences, meetings and debates, some of which have reached very optimistic conclusions about the partnership. Others have been more sceptical. The scepticism can be captured in the trenchant critique of the Accra Declaration, which emerged from a joint conference organised by Third World Network (TWN) and CODESRIA in Accra in 2002. CODESRIA stands for Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa. The Accra Declaration identifies the following as elements of 'fundamental flaws' contained in NEPAD:

- a. The neo-liberal economic policy framework at the heart of the plan repeats the structural adjustment policy packages of the preceding two decades and overlooks the disastrous effects of these policies.
- b. In spite of its proclaimed recognition of the central role of the African people in the plan, the African people have not played any part in the conception, design, and formulation of NEPAD.
- c. Notwithstanding its stated concerns for social and gender equity, NEPAD adopts the social and economic measures that have contributed to the marginalisation of women.
- d. That in spite of claims of African origin, its main targets are foreign donors, particularly the G8.

- e. Its vision of democracy is defined by the needs of creating a functional market.
- f. It underemphasises the external condition fundamental to Africa's developmental crisis and does not therefore promote any meaningful measure to manage and restrict the effects of this environment on African development efforts. The engagement that it seeks with institutions and processes like the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO and the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the Cotonou Agreement will further lock Africa's economy disadvantageously into this environment.
- g. The means for mobilisation of resources will further the disintegration of African economies as experienced with the structural adjustments and WTO rules (Accra Declaration 2002, para 10 a-g).

While the Accra declaration points to the fact that NEPAD adopts social and economic measures that contribute to the marginalisation of women, it does not tell us how such marginalisation can be counteracted. Neither does it allude to the gender blindness of NEPAD. The next section specifically examines the gender blindness of NEPAD. It argues that unless NEPAD develops a strong gender prism, the feminisation of poverty will increase and progress on the MDGs will run the risk of stalling.

Despite criticisms NEPAD, has attracted considerable support. This is perhaps because of its emphasis on good governance, which resonates well in the international financial architecture. Also, its underlying philosophy of neo-liberalism and openness is very attractive to the conglomerate world. NEPAD affirms that "today the weak state remains a major constraint on sustainable development in a number of countries. Indeed one of Africa's major challenges is to strengthen the capacity to govern and to develop long-term policies. At the same time, there is the urgent need to implement far reaching reforms and programmes in many African countries" (NEPAD para. 23). The goal of these reforms, as articulated in NEPAD, is to "enhance Africa's rapid integration into the world's economy".

But the rapid integration of Africa into the global economy does not ensure either a betterment of African women's lives, or the much sought after African Renaissance. African women have expressed their concerns about economic reforms and the "marketisation of governance", where the state is rolled back and reorganised "in the form of deregulation from public interest to regulation in terms of private interests" (Taylor 2000). In particular, gender equality advocates have stressed that current trends have pushed states into servicing the interests of market forces. Often, these interests are not the same as those of the dispossessed. Moreover, the growing feminisation of poverty across countries reveals that the reorganising of the state bears little relation to the process of social transformation (Taylor 2000). NEPAD seems to pay very little attention to such concerns.

**Table 1. Growth in selected African countries and regions**

Country/Region	1990	2006
Ghana	3.3	6.2
Kenya	4.2	5.7
Mauritius	5.8	3.5
Nigeria	8.2	5.9
South Africa	-0.3	5.0
Tanzania	7.0	5.9
Uganda	6.5	5.3
Sub-Saharan Africa	1.1	5.6
East Asia and Pacific	5.5	9.4

Source: World Development Indicators (2007)

### *Economic Growth in Africa and Gender*

For some 20 years from the mid 1970s up to the mid 1990s, per capita GDP growth in sub-Saharan Africa was either zero or negative (Artadi and Sala-I-Martin 2003). Sub-Saharan Africa registered the weakest economic performance amongst the developing regions (Ndulu *et al.* 2007). In the latter part of the 1990s however, growth began to strengthen, averaging some 2.3 percent during 1995-2000. Whether this growth has actually benefited African women adequately and equitably is a question that needs to be posed. Unfortunately, there is no specific data to be used to establish the facts, other than basing arguments on reports by SADC, UNDP and UNRISD about the growing feminisation of poverty in Africa, which make it relatively safe to argue that growth is not necessarily improving women's condition.

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, 2006a, 2006b, growth has accelerated further and averaged almost six percent per annum through 2007-08. However, growth of per capita GDP is a little over two percent because population growth in SSA remains high (Johnson *et al.* 2007).

Table 1 shows how growth has changed for some African countries between 1990 and 2006 but it is difficult to know how such growth translates into women's well being and how equitable it has been.

### *Growth Disaggregation and the African Woman Condition*

After the 1990s, various parts of Africa have experienced positive growth. It is important to reflect on that growth and to disaggregate it to understand the factors behind it, and more importantly, to see where women fit in. If the growth experienced is mostly the result of neo-liberalism and sectors that emphasise the movements and deregulation of capital with very few jobs being created, the African woman's condition would not improve accordingly.

**Table 2. Gender-Related Development Index (GDI) value**

Country	1999	2004
Seychelles	..	..
Mauritius	0.754	0.792
South Africa	0.689	0.646
Namibia	0.633	0.622
Botswana	0.606	0.555
Madagascar	..	0.507
Swaziland	0.636	0.479
Lesotho	0.570	0.486
Zimbabwe	0.555	0.483
Angola	..	0.431
Tanzania, U. Rep. of	0.418	0.426
Zambia	0.425	0.396
Malawi	0.390	0.394
Congo, Dem. Rep. of the	..	0.378
Mozambique	0.326	0.387

Source: Compiled from the UN Human Development Reports

*Neo-liberal agenda: A disabling policy environment for women*

Neo-liberal macroeconomic policies and associated strategies of domestic deregulation are rooted in the belief that minimalist state intervention in the economy and greater emphasis on market forces and profit maximisation lead to greater efficiency, higher rates of economic growth, widespread development, and a more rapid eradication of poverty. The UNRISD report titled “Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World” (2005), however notes that: “Analytical insights and mounting empirical evidence provide scant support for such prospects. This policy approach has not provided a supportive environment for improving women’s well-being, overcoming gender biases, and eroding gender gaps in basic capacities, opportunities and access to resources. Nor has it brought about a fairer sharing between women and men of the unpaid work and the costs involved in caring for the family and raising children.” (2005, p. 8)

Diverse structures of patriarchy continue to pervade women’s lives, thus acting as stumbling blocks to their advancement. Table 2 provides the Gender Development Index of certain African countries. The GDI is a composite index measuring average achievement in the three basic dimensions captured in the human development index (a long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living) adjusted to account for inequalities between men and women.

Despite progress made, it is evident that women are still confronted with many obstacles. The road towards gender equitable development is a long one.

In sub-Saharan Africa, women are disadvantaged in many respects, and the situation is worse than in most other parts of the world. This is evident

from the low rankings on UNDP's gender related development index. Almost all positions between 141 and 177 are occupied by sub-Saharan Africa countries (UNDP 2005).

Very little research is available on the macroeconomic consequences of gender inequality. One reason for this is the measurement problem. Putting numbers on gender based violence, exclusion of women from certain economic activities, bargaining power within households, etc, is difficult. Moreover, the most commonly used measure of inequality, which is income, is only available for households (Klasen 2005). Gender scholars and activists are still searching for refined alternatives for getting more accurate data for non-income inequality measures of well-being.

While NEPAD is projected as a major development framework, there is concern that unless it pays more attention to the gender dimensions of development, African women will be once more left out of the development process.

#### *Gender Blindness of NEPAD*

It is perhaps premature to start analysing the consequences of NEPAD. What is however clear is that NEPAD, the latest initiative by African leaders to attract investments into the continent, has demonstrated the same confounding blindness to gender. NEPAD's gender insensitivity has been well documented by Randriamaro (2002) and Longwe (2003), but neither of them articulates well the gender connection with African Renaissance.

In an article entitled "Assessment of Gender Orientation of NEPAD", Sara Longwe notes that despite the fine expression of gender principles, NEPAD's expression of gender goals is very vague and lacking. There is an overall "long term objective" to "promote the role of women in all activities", which is vague to the point of being meaningless. More importantly, Longwe adds that completely missing from the goals is any intention to increase women's representation in parliament despite clear commitments made by many African countries to address women's under-representation in parliament.

Zo Randriamaro also draws our attention to the absence of a gender prism within NEPAD. Randriamaro claims that NEPAD suffers from a narrow understanding of poverty issues that is likely to bring about contradictory outcomes and to increase existing social vulnerabilities and inequality, which remain particularly more pronounced amongst women. Randriamaro also notes that NEPAD shows an excessive emphasis on growth as "the single most important means for poverty reduction". She points out that even the World Bank has begun to see the broader social picture, realising that a single minded push for growth has only led to disappointment in Africa.

Although a "commitment to gender equality" is generally among the principles associated with African Renaissance, and has indeed become a catch-phrase, women in the continent find themselves increasingly trapped in

a cycle of extreme poverty. The liberation and emancipation project of the African Renaissance appears more and more difficult to achieve. The growing feminisation of poverty is confirmed in the UN Human Development Report (2003). All major initiatives, including NEPAD and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), commit to gender equality. But is it just in order to be politically correct that these and other development documents include a section on gender equality?

At the SADC Poverty and Development conference held in Mauritius in April 2008, Minister Joyce Banda from Malawi stated that MDG 3, which is about gender equality, was the one making the least progress. The question that should be posed, therefore, is why women benefit the least despite higher growth rates experienced by the continent. Can we therefore speak of an African renaissance if the continent's women continue to be deprived of some of their fundamental human rights?

## 2. Articulating the Potential for a Human/Gender faced NEPAD and the African Renaissance

The African Renaissance is a multifaceted philosophy/framework that encompasses different dimensions for the renewal, revitalisation, and reawakening of Africa. The history of the continent is one of multiple forms of exploitation. Unshackling the continent from the legacies of these exploitations demands a new vision. It is this very vision that is captured in the notion of the renaissance, based on, among others, the following principles:

- Economic recovery of the African continent;
- Political transition and democratisation;
- Building more equitable relations between Africa and the world economic powers;
- Mobilising Africans to reclaim and take their destiny into their own hands;
- Ensuring a people-centred development;
- Working towards the development and consolidation of African knowledge systems; and
- Commitment to gender equality.

The concept of African renaissance, as pointed out before, is not new. It has only gained currency since former South Africa's President, Thabo Mbeki, made reference to it in his famous speech "I am an African".

*"The African Renaissance is upon us. As we peer through the looking glass darkly, this may not be obvious. Africa reaffirms that she is continuing her rise from the ashes. Whatever the setbacks of the continent, nothing can stop us now! Whatever the difficulties, Africa shall be at peace and however improbable it may sound to the skeptics, Africa will prosper."* – (Mbeki 1996)

Africa's prosperity can only be triggered and sustained if truly gender inclusive developmental states are developed and consolidated. In other words, women in Africa must be treated as full citizens and be given every opportunity to fully use their potential.

Many great leaders and thinkers, such as Nelson Mandela, have drawn attention to the critical importance of empowering women. In his speech at the opening of the democratically elected parliament of South Africa in May 1994, Mandela said:

*"It is vitally important that all structures of government, including the president himself, should understand this fully. That freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. All of us must take this on board, that the objectives of RDP [the Reconstruction and Development Programme] will not have been realised unless we see in visible and practical terms, that the condition of women of our country has radically changed for the better, and that they have been empowered to intervene in all aspects of life as equals with any member of society."*

But for women to be truly empowered and African renaissance to be meaningful, all development frameworks should get rid of the multiple male biases, which often infuse policy documents.

In addition to suffering from gender silences, the practice and theory of development also suffers from important male biases, as Diane Elson aptly demonstrates. "Male Bias" highlights how the potential and contribution of women are often ignored.

### *Male Bias*

The economy is defined principally in terms of marketed goods and services, with some allowance made for subsistence crop production in developing countries. The work of caring for children, the sick, and the old, of gathering fuel and water, preparing food, keeping the house clean, and managing the household and so on, is usually excluded from systems that assess the economy. The very exclusion of such work from macroeconomic thinking and policy-making constitutes a built-in male bias.

The implicit assumption of macroeconomic policy is that the process of reproduction and maintenance of human resources tells against women. Women's unpaid labour is implicitly regarded as elastic – able to stretch so as to make up for any shortfall in other resources available for reproduction and maintenance of human resources. Women's unpaid time is often invisible to the macroeconomic policymakers.

Feminist analyses have sought to unmask the gendered character of the neo-liberal discourse, underscoring the gendered metaphors and symbolism that naturalise the relations of dominance. Neo-liberal discourse draws upon

gendered binaries in privileging finance over manufacture, market over state, global over local, and the consumer over the producer. For instance, the market is represented as robust as against the feminised state, which is represented as a drag on the economy that must be subordinate to the market. The state, thus, seeks to re-masculinise through a role similar to the private sector, minimising welfare and increasing its role of surveillance and coercion (Marchand and Runyan 2000). The changing form and nature of the nation state alongside the rise of right wing political parties and state sponsored fundamentalisms has accordingly been an area of focus in feminist debates on globalisation (Moghadam 1996). Writing about Africa, Mohau Pheko (1999) maintains that liberalisation, in the context of globalisation, represents a site of terrorism and violence against women. Trade liberalisation is viewed as a form of economic terrorism on women's socio-economic rights. Observers who concur with this view see globalisation and trade liberalisation, and all the institutions that promote free trade, in need of a strong gender analysis. Pheko writes: "They argue that it is necessary because the violence generated by this model is decorated with seductive language, adorned with such symbolic clothing, that we get seduced and mystified by what we see, not realising how insidious and violent its impact is until it is too late." (1999, p. 77)

For African Renaissance to be embedded, and for the link between African Renaissance and development to be strengthened, there is an urgent need to effectively inscribe gender into development theory and practice. But this too, depends on profound and far-reaching changes in all facets of society.

In many ways, NEPAD is a replication of the structural adjustment programs (SAPs) of the 1980s, and is infused with a neo-liberal philosophy. This economic agenda that rose to dominance in the early 1980s, was centred on macro-economic stability and fiscal discipline. What this meant was a rolling back of the state. Needless to say, women were its greatest victims. The present ideology of the market that pervades NEPAD can once more impact negatively on women and marginalise them further. NEPAD must therefore be transformed into a human faced and "capabilities enhancing" NEPAD, and it is through the construction of democratic gender inclusive developmental states that this will be possible.

### **3. Gender Inclusive Democratic Developmental States**

Gender inclusive democratic developmental states refer to states that have been elected by the people and which formulate and implement gender equitable policies for the attainment of its development goals. For democratic developmental states to be gender inclusive, there needs to be a minimum critical mass of women legislators in government, who can push for gender sensitive legislations to improve women's conditions.

The success of the East Asian countries during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has attracted the world's attention. Countries such as Japan, Korea and Taiwan have, during the post-world war period, enjoyed impressive economic growth rates and rapid industrialisation. Growth models that rely on individual entrepreneurs reacting to market signals could not predict or explain the kind of transformation that occurred in East Asia. Ha Joon Chang (1999) demonstrates how the state played a critical role in this unprecedented process of economic and social transformation. This explains why these states were described as developmental. More precisely Chang (1999) defines a developmental state as one which considers the objectives of long term growth and structural change seriously, and which at the same time has the potential of creating and regulating the political and economic relationships that are necessary for sustained industrialisation. According to Chang, conflicts are bound to happen during the process of change, but political management of the economy helps to mitigate these conflicts. An engagement with institutional adaptation and innovation is also required in order to achieve the overall objectives of growth and structural change

Leftwich's (1995) definition of developmental states, in some ways, echoes that of Chang. Leftwich argues:

*"...Developmental states may be defined as states whose politics have concentrated sufficient power, autonomy, and capacity at the centre to shape, pursue, and encourage the achievement of explicit developmental objectives, whether by establishing and promoting the conditions and direction of economic growth, or by organising it directly, or a varying combination of both"* (p. 401).

According to Peter Evans (1997) developmental states combine

*"...Weberian bureaucratic insulation with intense immersion in the surrounding social structure. How this contradictory combination is achieved depends of course, on both the historically determined character of the state apparatus and the nature of the social structure in which it is embedded"* (p. 80).

Beeson (1999, p. 2) describes the developmental state and its objectives as a "rational plan", which is determined to influence the direction and pace of economic development by directly intervening in the development process, rather than relying on the co-ordinated influence of market forces to allocate economic resources. The objective of the developmental state is to promote development by attending to important social and economic goals. Beeson concludes that the democratic developmental state is able to do this because it has ensured widespread social consensus on the importance and relevance of this particular path towards economic development.

In his description of the developmental state, Edigheji (2005) emphasises the organisational capacity of the state. This feature is essential in defining

and promoting the development goals of a country. Edigheji, citing Evans, points to the importance of the state forming alliances with key social groups in order to achieve its development goals.

Discourses on the developmental states, however, tend to be gender blind. In a paper titled "Gender silences: Omissions or part of the big picture?" Mansah Prah (2006) notes: "...The gender silences we experience as individuals and as nationals of different countries of the global community have occurred not because they are simple omissions or slip-ups in development theory and practice. Like the minute spaces found in any hand woven cloth, the silences constitute an integral part of the fabric of the discourse of development."

#### *Gendering Governance for an Improved Human Condition*

Since it is established that women are at the heart of development, it is very important for governance to be urgently engendered. This brings to mind the UN dictum that "without engendering development, development itself is endangered".

Kevane's (2004, p. 2) succinct summary of the plight of a large number of women and girls in Africa shows the amount of work that remains to be done to make governance and development more gendered. Kevane notes that women continue to face unequal educational opportunities, less inheritance and ownership of assets, discrimination in employment and occupations, violence at home and in public spaces, and limited political representation. These conditions result in diminished welfare and a reduced capacity to fulfil life aspirations.

As a continent, Africa remains excluded. It has a marginal role and location in the global system, and remains very poorly integrated. While many people speak of the marginalisation of the African continent, Samir Amin (1974) argues that the continent is not marginalised but rather that it is insufficiently integrated. One can perhaps go further to suggest that it is not simply a question of the extent of Africa's non-integration but that Africa's non-integration raises a moral question: The "marginalisation and mal-integration" of Africa in the global system illustrates the unequal power relations and terms of exchange that persist.

In fact, one of the major criticisms lodged against NEPAD is its insufficient attention to the inequitable world order and the unequal nature of partnerships (Bunwaree 2008). If Africa's marginalisation is not reversed, gains made so far, particularly on gender relations, run the risk of being eroded.

As we move further into the new millennium, the relentless struggle for a human-faced globalisation, peace, and gender equality becomes increasingly urgent. Much has changed since the first 1975 United Nations Conference on the Decade for Women. The world has moved from seeing women as victims to viewing them as integral actors in transformation and change. But

if globalisation remains unequal and unfair, with poverty spreading its tentacles and conflicts increasing, the chances of an African Renaissance taking root and becoming entrenched remain dim.

## Conclusion

It is clear that globalisation is not working for the world's poor, particularly women. It is not working for much of the environment. It is not working for the stability of the global economy. Some may be tempted to say, let's abandon globalisation. Others will no doubt argue that it is inevitable. However, globalisation can be reshaped to realise its potential for good. If Africa speaks with one voice – inclusive of the voices of its women – there is hope for increased space for the construction and consolidation of gender inclusive developmental states. The agenda of African feminists should therefore focus on:

1. Insisting on the importance of eliminating illiteracy among poor women as an urgent first step towards women's entitlements, expansion of their choices, implementation of their rights, and enhancement of their socially acquired capabilities.
2. Working and advocating for the removal of legal obstacles and cultural constraints to women's access to and control over productive resources, such as land and credit.
3. Promoting awareness on the need for poverty eradication programmes to be based on gendered analysis of the nature and extent of women's and men's differential entitlements, choices, rights, and capabilities.
4. Encourage international financial institutions to implement foreign debt cancellation, reduction and/or rescheduling on condition that resources are directed towards eradicating poverty in general and its gendered dimension in particular.
5. Promote the use of both quantitative and qualitative feminist research methods to analyse the gendered dimensions of relative and absolute poverty, to emphasise the links between economic production and social reproduction and to render unremunerated labour visible in order that it may be accounted for in economic planning and poverty eradication strategies.
6. Getting feminists, particularly African feminist economists, to the negotiating tables within the WTO, and increase levels of awareness about the importance of more ethical trade.
7. Networking and sharing experiences so that knowledge production and advocacy is done in such a way that it is rooted in and informed by local realities.
8. Work towards a more effective participation of the representatives of developing countries within global institutions, and ensure an equitable role within.

Changing the lives of women for the better and empowering them to intervene in all aspects of life is the collective responsibility of each and all. There is an urgent need for more women to participate in the political affairs of the country. More women are needed not for a “politics of presence” but for a “politics of ideas” point of view, for a more transformative agenda as well as for the emergence and consolidation of gender inclusive democratic developmental states.

However, gender inclusive democratic developmental states can only be effective if the economic reforms undertaken by the different African nations do not allow the further rolling back of the states. The latter means less government intervention, less safety nets and if this were to keep on happening, less resources will go to women, thus making the feminist agenda as proposed very difficult to implement.

Without a revolution in gender relations, what has been described as women’s “missed potential” by the World Bank will take its toll on the continent and impact negatively on the renaissance.

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